

THE RED VEIL: WEDDING DRESSES AGAINST GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN LATIN AMERICAN ART

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Resumen: Un vestido de novia puede representar muchas cosas. En términos del patriarcado, una mujer atándose a un hombre de por vida o su virginidad, simbolizado en la pureza de la tela. Una boda puede ser el paso hacia una vida de violencia y esclavitud. Los rituales de boda, eventos que suceden antes y después de la ceremonia, pueden también ser una forma de control de las mujeres y su sexualidad. Este artículo realiza una mirada de cerca al trabajo de artistas latinoamericanas que utilizan el traje de novia y los rituales alrededor de la boda en sus piezas artísticas como forma de criticar la violencia de género.

Palabras clave: Arte, feminismo, arte contemporáneo, boda, ritual.

Abstract: A wedding dress can be a symbol for many things. In terms of patriarchy a woman tying herself to a man, and the white of her virginity represented in the purity of the fabric. A wedding can be a step into a life of violence and slavery. Wedding rituals, the events taking place before and after the ceremony, can also be a way to control women and their sexuality. This article is a close up to the work of Latin American artists that use wedding gowns and rituals in their art works as a way to criticise gender based violence.

Key words: Art, feminism, contemporary art, wedding, ritual.

Gladys Ricart, a 39-year old Dominican woman, was already dressed for her wedding in September 26, 1999. She was surrounded by her friends and family in the living room of her New Jersey home when Agustín García, her former boyfriend shoot her to death just a few hours before she was to be married to another man (Jacobs, 1999; Jones, 2002). This act constitutes a horrible patriarchal irony, since the system ruled by men educates women to feel like the day of their wedding is the start of their lives. Since the death of Ricart, dozens of women, organized by the New York Latinas Against Domestic Violence, march every September 26 on the streets of New York to remember her and to remember that women's lives are in danger in a society that invests more in prosecution than in prevention of gender based violence. In a society where men still think that their partners are their personal property, and allows them to play with their lives. "The Gladys Ricart and Victims of Domestic Violence Memorial Walk also mourns and memorializes the many other victims whose lives have been taken as a result of domestic violence related incidents, and it raises awareness of the seriousness and horrors of family violence" (Brides-march) Brides March, as they call it, also occurs in other places, like Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico, where Dominican women dress with wedding gowns or white clothes to commemorate the life of Gladys Ricart and the women that die every year at the hands of their partners, ex-partners or husbands.

Inspired by these women, Puerto Rican artist Tanya Torres took, in 2007, her own wedding dress and made it into an art piece, *Memorial*, by adding elements of the Latin culture and a red lace at the top symbolizing blood. It was first exhibited in front of her house in New York as well as a photo of it in her blog where people could share their thoughts about marriage and violence against women. It has also been exhibited in Puerto Rico, at Galería Guaitibiri in Río Piedras and at the Espacio Abierto Gallery, Habana (Cuba). Like the women that march every year down the streets of New York, Tanya wants people to remember the death of Gladys Ricart and, to search a way to finally eliminate gender violence, a form of violence that is killing thousands of women every year around the globe. In words of the artist:

At that time I was working at the University where most of the students were Puerto Ricans or Hispanic and almost all of them had been victims of domestic violence, incest, rape and every other way of violence against women. Every conversation I had with them affected me and that experience made me close to the problem in a personal way (Torres, 2012).

Latin American artists, as most international artists do, include their regions, countries and continent political issues and culture in their own art works, like Torres does including elements of her Puerto Rican heritage in her wedding dress, and addressing the stories of her students. This has occupied thousands of art criticism pages that deal with the way the Western world and the art metropolis study and curate Latin American art. Because of the postcolonial, and colonial realities, and its religious culture, in the continent have been developed types of abuse against women that are not seen in other parts of the world. In the article “Este cuerpo es mío: Manifestaciones culturales contemporáneas en torno a la violencia machista en América Central y el Caribe español” (Quiñones, 2010), that I wrote for the journal *Arte y políticas de identidad*, I discuss how gender violence in Latin America can be different from other places around the world. Because of that, artists that are interested in politics have studied the reasons and implications of those actions of patriarchy. Some of these violent actions against women come directly from institutions, like the massive sterilization of women, especially in Puerto Rico, but also in other countries, including the South of the United States. The sterilizations were made mostly without the proper consent of the woman in question, in an attempt of the health agencies of dropping the working-class Puerto Rican population (Briggs, 2002, 75, 143-145), in spite of being a women’s rights struggle (sterilization should be a thing a woman can have access to if she wants). In this topic, Ana María García made the documentary *La operación* (The Surgery, 1982), in which she interviews victims and gives facts about the process on the island. The name of the work is relevant to the way women refer to the sterilization surgery, it was so common between the 40’s and the 70’s decades of the 20th century, that women called it only “the surgery” and everyone on the island knew exactly what was that they were referring to. Papel Machete, a puppeteers group that is involved in independence and socialist struggles in the island, has made recently a show that with the name *I Hate You!: Episodios del genocidio boricua y otros relatos deshumanizantes* (I Hate You!: Episodes from the Boricua Genocide and Other Dehumanizing Stories, 2012), in which they depict, in a comical attitude, the horrors Puerto Ricans have lived because of U.S. imperialism and their colonial status (Pérez Rivera, 2012). An example of a different type of birth control, this time among native Indians in Guatemala and other countries

in Central America, which were victim of invasions through the Cold War, United States trained groups, like Contra, had a system in which the military raped repeatedly pregnant indigenous women, so they aborted, diminishing the population. Guatemalan artist Regina José Galindo studied this case and made the piece *Mientras, ellos siguen libres* (Meanwhile, They Are Still Free, 2007), performance she made while she was pregnant, tying herself to a bed with umbilical cords on wrists and ankles.

Violence based on gender stereotypes can affect many people, from women in a relationship, or women that just have left their partner; women that do not want to be in one; and those are the type that more people are aware of. But it could be also, gender based violence, the oppression committed to a man that does not follow the roles patriarchal society wants him to follow (because he is gay or transgender, etc.), or to a man that maintains a non-sexual or non-loving relationship with a woman and is attacked by her partner because the partner thinks she is his property. Wedding rituals, as one of the pillars of today's patriarchy, affects primarily women because they are the ones whom have to go through the step and the ceremony is centred around the woman, as she is in transition from one family to another. Wedding rituals are different in every part of the world, and Latin America is not the exception, every country or region having their own traditions, and affecting women in ways that the rest of the world is not aware. This article discusses the way Latin American artists are using wedding dresses and wedding ceremony rituals in their artwork to fight violence against women, especially from a Latin American perspective, taking into account endemic traditions. At the same time, they insert their theme and iconography in the particularities of Latin American popular culture, making art from Latin America, as Gerardo Mosquera would have said (2009, 4). "Latin American feminist art production synthesizes its aesthetic politics in the body, as European and North American feminist art does, but it tightens the relationship with the ritual, because artistic actions are understood as healing rituals or for the evocation of the sacred, as ancestral American cultures or African cultures did" (Antivilo Peña, 2006). How do Latin American women artists battling against gender based violence resist the cultural homogenization that the United States especially is trying to impose in the rest of America, using wedding images? and How do they address the problems that Latin American women suffer in their own type of postcolonial patriarchy, with wedding rituals as a common theme? These are the main questions I pretend to answer with this article.

While inside the gender violence artistic politics and practices from Latin America, the artists that use wedding gowns and rituals to fight the plague, do not address the direct problems of imperialism (the reason for sterilizations and indigenous rape discussed above), but ones more related to religion, an attitude that has to do with imperialism in a degree, since today's practices are the evolution of the Catholicism brought by Europeans, and the religion is motivated into the impoverished people to maintain control. Since a wedding dress is so full of symbolism, it's white because the woman marrying must be pure and virginal, it's the dress that the woman is using the day she becomes part of a man's life and can be mistaken as becoming his personal property, and it is a dress that is never used for any other type of ceremony or festivity, it becomes the perfect image in contemporary art, especially in the kitsch and ritual traditions in Latin American art. The beauty of the gown gives splendour to the bride which is objectified and made the show of the day. She is offered to the male as a gift and he substitutes the father, who is her former owner (Ballester, 2012, 276).

This is the reason feminist artists have introduced wedding gowns in many of their pieces to denounce patriarchy. Hannah Höch, the German Dada artist was the first person in the 20th century to play with the idea in her piece *Die Braut* (The Bride), 1927. Simulating a view from the altar, the bride and groom are taken from the arm and the bride's head has been replaced with an enormous baby head that is looking around as if she had no idea what is going on around her. In the form of bubbles with wings, some objects surround the couple, elements that remind us of what a wife is meant to be. A new born child breast feeding, a crying eye, a snake around a fruit, a heart with a weight tied up with a chain, and other objects that point out the new wife's duties and question the place of weddings in the 20th century.

Stepping a few years forward, the artists of the second wave of feminism made their own criticisms of the sacred sacrament as well. At Woman House in California, Kathy Huberland took a mannequin and dressed it as a bride. The dress train turned almost yellow when it was dragged to the kitchen. Then it was installed in the landing tread of the staircase almost making fun of the moment, the sacred moment that is so important for every "normal" woman (Aliaga, 2007, 277).

BETH MOYSÉS AND LORENA WOLFFER: REPRESENTING THE BRIDE IN FEMINIST LATIN AMERICAN ART

When talking about the wedding dress as a symbol of female slavery in Latin American art Beth Moysés cannot be left out. Her actions are rituals, as weddings, in every culture, are a type of ritual. But Beth Moysés' rituals are inserted into the Brazilian artistic culture. At the beginning of the 20th century, and the development of modern art in Brazil, Tarsila do Amaral, Oswaldo and Mario de Andrade started the Antropofagist movement in which they combined European ideology about native Brazilian tribes, and cannibalism, with African rituals brought with the black slavery. A wedding dress can represent a festivity, a tradition, a celebration, but it also represents the start of a life of agony for many women. Moysés performances almost always include a group of women dressed as a bride or in white clothes. She thinks that the wedding marks an initiation ritual for many women and is also an important symbol in women's culture, and she has dedicated her career to researching the physical and psychological violence a woman can suffer in her married life (Moysés, 2008).

Through aesthetics and poetic statements, since 1994, Brazilian artist Beth Moysés (Sao Paulo, 1960) works with the wedding dress as a symbol that is traditionally affiliated with femininity, and she turns it into a metaphor of affection, love and pureness. Using it she confronts the violence that many women suffer and male domination exerted in marriage [...] In her work, she does not go against the marital institution, but she criticizes the bridal gown as a feminine garment attached to what matrimony means as a symbol of never ending love and the woman's place offered to the man as a gift (Ballester, 2012, 271).

Male power and female innocence are mixed in Beth Moysés work, illusions broken after the first explosion of violence. But the way women participate in her performances makes them get back the power stolen the first time they wore that wedding dress.

Moysés always chooses women that have been victims of gender violence. That way they can share their feelings and cleanse their spirits from the trauma of the insults and hits. They take their old wedding dresses, almost yellow from the time they've been stored in a closet (Ballester, 2012, 272). "As everything in life, white things turn to be not so white with time, as the wedding dress turns yellowy in reference to an outdated love story that does not have a happy ending" (Ballester, 2012, 275). Performances directed by Beth have happened around the globe. One of the countries where she has concentrated most of her work is Spain, right where *Reconstruyendo sueños* (Reconstructing Dreams) 2007, took place. A group of women gathered in Canovas Boardwalk, at Cáceres, where they, dressed with their wedding gowns, sew lines with black thread, in the white gloves they were wearing, simulating the lines of their hands, and then, in a liberating gesture, they took them off and threw them away (Lozano, 2009, 356). The black lines can be read as wounds that these women close, to start a life without violence.

In her native country, at the city of Sao Paulo, 150 women congregated in November of the year 2000 with their old wedding dresses and walked down Paulista Avenue with rose bouquets and throwing the petals on the street. When the performance ended they buried the remaining petals on the ground at a public square, the performance was named *Memoria do afeto* (Memory of Affection) (Fazzolari, 2010, 255). As a dramatic symbol of what a marriage can turn into she makes the installation *Luta* (Fight), 2002. A pair of boxing gloves made out of wedding dresses white fabric and embroidery. They are light, delicate objects but express the violence hiding in some relationships. Some marriages can end in a continuous fight as she puts out with this pair of gloves. The illusion of the wedding and the beauty of the wedding dress turn into situations that appear continuously in newspapers (Mendoza, 2012, 268). The most famous image from any Moysés' action is the one where a group of women, dressed in wedding gowns, clean clothes in bowls full of blood. The organic fluid has been used frequently in actions against gender based violence, especially in Latin America, where blood represents, in pre-Columbian and African rituals, a cleansing and purifying material and not a negative force. Antropofagist artists used blood as a symbol of cannibalism, which was used as resistance against cultural homogenization in Latin America, and with the purpose of identity recognition apart from the dominant cultures, Europe and the United States. In the reality the bowls are simply full of water tainted with red marker tint. The action is called *Diluidas en agua* (Water Diluted, 2008) and in it participate 20 women from a violence victims refugee and 20 activists. They each made a white dress and wrote in it, with red marker, their experiences and everything they had left behind, and then washed it in the water bowl, erasing everything they wrote, in a pain relieving ritual. This turned the water in the bowls red, with their suffering and their memories (Moysés, 2012, 150). In the article "Sangre y rito: la estética ancestral en las prácticas artísticas de contenido feminista y social en Latinoamérica" ("Blood and Rite: Ancestors Aesthetics in Social and Feminist Contemporary Latin American Art") (2012, 214-239), I studied the utilization of blood in the work of Latin American women artists that fight imperialism and patriarchy with their work.

Sometimes burring symbolizing objects can be therapeutic and liberating, as it was for the women that took part in the performance *Memoria do afeto*, and that's exactly what Lorena Wolffer does with the red veil Lorena Wolffer in her piece *Looking for the Perfect You*, presented in 1993 at Le Lieu Space, Quebec. Wolffer is a Mexican artist that has worked in her native land, as well as the United States and Canada. At the heart of winter,

on a snowed-in patio, Lorena is dressed with a white nightdress, and a long bridal veil hanging from her head and dragging over the snow. The veil was soaked with blood. (Alcazar, 2001) The bride stops walking, takes the bloody veil off her head, extends it on the snow, feeling the cutting cold in her feet. Clumsily and slowly she tries to cover the bloody cloak with the little snow she somehow manages to collect with her frozen hands. People from the audience offer help. Then, a lot of hands cover the veil completely (Villareal, 1996).

She was looking to make the people of the audience compare the situation of women in Mexico and Canada, both American countries and in a postcolonial situation, but with a very different economic situation, where one has fewer interruptions from outside than the other, and both countries where patriarchy steals women rights. The performance ends with the burying of the bloody veil below the snow, representing the way many women suffer violence in silence inside their marriages, leading to death for many of them (Ballester, 2012, 280-81). In spite of blood being a ritual cleansing material, as it is mentioned above, especially in Latin American actions since the pre-Columbian era, the negative charge of blood in a violent scene is still there, because it is physical evidence of mistreatment. Here Lorena is putting in the negativity of the violent scene that goes without anyone seeing. But in other performances, especially in the 90's, like *Bañate* (Take a Shower, 1992-1993), and *Territorio Mexicano* (Mexican Territory, 1994), Lorena has used blood as a ritual organic element, taken from the rite tradition in modern Latin American art.

While planning for *Looking for the Perfect You*, she prepared a declaration which she handed out before the performance to avoid misunderstanding, so people could read and understand her intention to walk as a frozen bride, getting the snow dirty from the blood of the veil (Wolffer). She walked with naked feet, on the snow, with a veil that left the pureness of the snow with a trail of blood, also referencing the breaking of the hymen in the wedding night, which symbolizes how the new husband is the owner of the wife's sexuality (Ballester, 2012, 280-81). Analysing blood rites as part of the Latin American culture, in terms of ancestry and modern art, one could insert the ritual of the blood in the bed sheets, as one of them. But making a gender analysis it should be realized that is a ritual that is violating human rights, so it should be eliminated, in spite of allegations of cultural change or assimilation. Eliminating a cultural tradition that is against human rights is not allying with imperialism, it is allying, in this case, with women's rights. Later we will discuss other performances and contemporary pieces that take the hymen breaking as a cause for gender violence using before and after wedding rituals.

RAQUEL PAIEWONSKY'S *INMACULADA*, AND LIFE AFTER THE WEDDING

The works of Beth Moysés and Lorena Wolffer are pretty clear. They both use direct symbols in their pieces and make sure the public gets the message by written or oral declarations. But, some other artists that work with gender and women's issues are not so clear. The public can make many types of interpretations of the work. Raquel Paiewonsky's installations and photographs have that factor. They always use the body, either complete or parts of it, and have a gender perspective.

The artist uses the body as a kind of tropological platform from which to illumine these issues in their own complexity and in the imaginal complexity of art, without falling into the literalness of some of the works of social criticism in the Dominican Republic. We are confused if we think that her artworks are about the body or sexuality. It is only so indirectly because in her the body is above all else a critical resource that drives her artistic expression with great power. Thus the problems raised by her photo *Preámbulo* (Preamble) (2008), without question one of the artist's best pieces, which scandalized and was subject to censure despite having obtained the well-deserved Grand Prize of the XXII Eduardo León Jiménez Competition. The taboo implanted upon this artwork illustrates the capacity of the impact I refer to as well as the incorrect receiving of her message in terms of pedophilia—one of the few forbidden zones still remaining—and not as a denunciation of the serious problem of child prostitution intertwined with the poetic allusion to the metamorphosis of the feminine body, in a beautiful threading that enhances the testimonial sense of the body and at the same time it excludes the pamphlet (Mosquera, 2012, 84-85).

Violence is not implicit in her piece *Inmaculada* (Immaculate), 2010, but its title gives us a way we can go to interpret these white cleaning clothes made into a woman's very long dress. Materials and color are very important in Paiewonsky's work, two elements that give this piece its significance. The dress is made from cleaning clothes what can be interpreted as the way of life of a woman. She must work hard for the home to be clean for her husband and kids, in addition she must always be chaste, immaculate, without a stain; no stain in the home or the spirit. The pureness of the woman, of the wife, is what differentiates her from a prostitute or a woman without value, because her value is in her ability to be a good mother, a good wife and in her chastity until she is married. In this case the cleaning clothes dress acts as the wedding dress, the woman does not put it on for a wedding ritual but for a household ritual, but the same faithfulness to the husband is still expected from her.

In Raquel Paiewonsky's work the suffering and limitations women face due to patriarchy in her own context is very present, as it is in Tanya Torres' work, in this case, the Dominican Republic. As a country where the majority of the population is of African descent, but has denied its roots for a large period of its history, Raquel Paiewonsky continues the modern and contemporary artistic tradition of rescuing the African heritage. In her installations and photographic work, her main characters are blacks; they are mostly women, or males playing alternate gender roles. The women that wear those dresses in Paiewonsky's photos are *mulatas* or black, as the characters in many of the modern and contemporary art works in the Dominican Republic.

GALINDO AND MENDIETA: THE SEARCH FOR THE UNBROKEN HYMEN

Abusive wedding rituals do not start at the moment the bride puts on the white gown, they can be a process where the woman has to take some steps without the knowledge of her fiancé. In Guatemala, for example, the pressure of virginity for the first night with the new husband is so strong that many women have a vaginal reconstruction operation before the wedding. Some of them have enough money to pay for certified doctors that as-

sure their health during the process, but many of them don't, so they have to let doctors without credentials perform the surgery on them. Guatemalan artist Regina José Galindo, aware of the suffering of low income women that feel such a pressure, went herself to an uncertified doctor for him to perform the vaginal reconstruction. Hours later, when Regina was heading home, she had to be taken for an Emergency Room because of abundant bleeding, caused by a botched medical procedure. With the consequences of the surgery Galindo does not only make a statement about the conditions in which poor women have to get operated in, but about the hypocrisy society constructs around women's sexuality. Almost everyone in Guatemala is aware of this system, and knows that women have sex before they get married but have the hymen reconstruction surgery a few days before the wedding. Men's pride is still oppressive enough that they pretend nothing happens and that they own their wife's virginity.

Taken together, Galindo's performances and poems suggest that despite society's drive to contain women, their bodies and sexuality, female intemperance is constantly threatening to destabilise the status quo [...] The performance *Himeoplastia* (Guatemala, 2004), for example, comments on society's obsession with controlling, whilst simultaneously refusing to speak about, women's supposedly excessive sexuality (Lavery 2011, 55).

Willingly going through the surgery, Galindo is, like most of her works, the victim and the victimizer, using these perspectives to analyze the intrinsic body politics that surround this and other types of gender based violence. She understands art reality and knows that with a work of art it is almost impossible to change society (Galindo, 2013). Also, contemporary art is so limited in its audience, that it does not foster a significant increase in the number of people that know about the problem. But putting herself out there and going through surgery allows her to do something that nearly no one can do save artists. It is a type of sociological research with herself that questions what women are capable of doing to her bodies because of patriarchal impositions; a form of violence against women where women that go through with it appear to do it by their own will, but in reality uncovers a series of questions about the reasons, and how the society is imposing virginity at dangerous levels. With *Himenoplastia* the audience can also question the reasons women have to do other types of aesthetic surgery that are accepted in the Western world just because they are common in "developed" countries, like mammal augmentation or abdomen reduction, etc. Maybe from a Western perspective the surgery Guatemalan women go through just to be "virgins" on the day of their wedding, is an aberration, but other types of aesthetic surgery are not viewed so. Sometimes, such a double standard can also end in an overlook of the problem from the Western point of view:

The notion of a universal patriarchy has been widely criticized in recent years for its failure to account for the workings of gender oppression in the concrete cultural contexts in which it exists. Where those various contexts have been consulted within such theories, it has been to find "examples" or "illustrations" of a universal principle that is assumed from the start. The form of feminism theorizing has come under criticism for its efforts to colonize and appropriate non-Western cultures to support highly Western notions of oppression, but because they tend as well to construct a "Third World" or even an "Orient" in which gender oppression is subtly explained as symptomatic of an essential, non-Western barbarism (Butler, 1990, 3).

While the husband wants that little piece of woman's anatomy to be intact, in other countries of Latin America there was, and still is in some of them, a common practice of searching for blood in the sheets the couple used the first night. Blood in it is sign of an unbroken hymen, a woman that has conserved virginity until marriage. Ana Mendieta, knowing about the practice in Mexico, a country she had a special bond with, made two pieces that represented the blood on the sheets. The white of those sheets is the purity of the virgin that has been sacrificed for the pleasure of the husband, leaving a red trail behind. Following her native land's religious traditions, like Santería, Ana Mendieta decapitates a white chicken in her 1972 action: *Death of a Chicken*, where the white feathers of the bird "[get] transformed into the white sheet exposed to demonstrate to the curious community that the bride was, without a doubt, a virgin—as 'clean' as the sheet—at the moment of her wedding" (Moure 1996, 35). The chicken is also sacrificed, like the woman's virginity. Mendieta, naked, holds the chicken, still moving as though it was still alive, and spills blood in all directions, staining the white feathers. Again, the image of a white cloth, that had been used to sew the wedding gown or the sheets for the "first night", comes to our notice. Two years later, a much clearer piece was made by her *Untitled* (Body Print of Iowa), where she lied down on the floor and got covered with a white sheet stained with blood all over. Mendieta was very aware of the traditions in modern and contemporary art that were recently developing in her native country and wanted an attachment to the piece of land she was "retrieved" from. These actions were not only inside that tradition of African heritage that was present in Cuban art since modernity, but were also one of the many parts of the engine that moved Cuban artists to a developed contemporary art that had its peak in the exhibition *Volume I* in 1981.

Overall, as it can be read in the article, feminist art in Latin America is widely diverse and approaches gender violence with creativity and consciousness. It should not be understood here that Latin American artists have to work around the ancestral, and heritage traditions, but that they include their context in their work, as artists do in any part of the world. The difference between Latin American artists and their counterparts in Europe and the United States is that Western society has a dominion on mass media that makes us understand their culture as the common culture, thus seeing the artistic production from the West as universal and Latin American, African and Oriental as exotic. The artists studied here make a rightful statement about the oppression women of their respective countries and regions are suffering from a postcolonial and colonial patriarchy that make men in their own country want to control their bodies and men in the colonizing countries, especially the U.S., want to control it too, suffering from a double patriarchy. They use strong images that fight imperialism in two ways because they are resisting the internationalization of Western culture, the homogenization of their own culture and the imposition of rules that are violent to women. Those rituals, before, during, and after the wedding have deeply penetrated their culture, but, even when they want to resist the imposition of other cultural ideas they understand that rituals that are violent and violate human rights should not have space in their own culture. Rituals as a form of art (actions, performances), and as a form of connecting with heritage (pre-Columbian, African, and today's Latin American life) are very useful in depicting the way wedding ceremonies (that are cultural rituals as well) are a wall in the way of women's rights, and in that way this form of art, that studies those rituals specifically, is an interesting subject inside the artistic practices against gender based violence in Latin America.

They also challenge the way the Western population views Latin American culture as an undeveloped one that does not respect women's rights, depicting, like Regina José Galindo does, oppression methodologies that can be unique in Latin America but are analogous other methods women in Western civilization have to go through to appear as the patriarchal society they also live in expects them to do. These artists research and study the suffering of women in their own context, by relating themselves with women that have suffered direct gender based violence. In that way they are also studying the cases that happen in Latin America, or to Latinas in the U.S., even when it is a type of violence that happens all around the world. In her career, Lorena Wolffer has made installations and performances that deal with objects and confessions of survivals of gender violence. Beth Moysés works, in the performances presented here, and many others, with women that live in protected refugees for surviving victims, and Tanya Torres, as she declared in an interview with the author, has interviewed with many Latinas living especially in New York City, that have confided to her their stories of violence and rape. This way, the artists studied in this article speak from the reality of women in their own context and not from a perspective of a global idea of violence against women.

These artists, as all Latin Americans do, have to deal with race issues because, coming from mixture of races and cultures, they are seen as the other in the eyes of Caucasian North Americans. Another way of inserting their works in their context, and making their projects unique is by studying race and ethnical problems in their works. As political artists it is a topic they usually address, and that, from the gender perspective is an important one because many of the aberrations committed to Latin American women have their nucleus in race. The massive sterilizations were a racial injustice where only black women from the South of the United States, Puerto Ricans, and other Latin American women suffered from it. It is a consequence of Social Darwinism and eugenics, where it is seen as important for human evolution to stop the reproduction of races seen as the other (blacks, *mestizo*, *mulato*, and indigenous in America; Jewish in Germany, etc.), that was in fashion since the 1930's until the mid 1950's. The theory also includes impoverished populations, such as Latin Americans who are victims of capitalist expansion from the north. In the work of Raquel Paiewonsky for example she has to defend the African heritage as opposed to the white European one which has developed a racial problem in the Dominican Republic where Dominicans only see their Haitian neighbours as black and they see themselves as white Spanish.

There are many ways Latin American artists fight violence against women, like it is mentioned in the introduction, the types that only occur in Latin America, like massive sterilizations, racially centered rape, Juárez, Guatemalan and Salvadorian femicides, and other forms, like violence from the partner, that take place all around the world. Artists like Lorena Wolffer, Regina José Galindo and Ana Mendieta (mentioned above), or another like Teresa Margolles, Jessica Lagunas, Sandra Monterroso, etc. insert the study of violence against women in their region and countries artistic traditions, creating interesting art works that are very important in the development of Latin American contemporary art and are unique because of the resistance the political conscious artists of the region have developed. Oppression does not end with the wedding rituals, and the artists discussed in this article make that clear in their works. A wedding is a door, in many cases it is the start of a woman's life and it can be the start of a life of violence. Some of the artists that are mentioned are activists

and not only create but research. They use their performances to help women in violent situations. For them one of the changes that a society has to make in order to liberate women from patriarchy is to eliminate the concept of a wedding as the most important step in a woman's life, as if her value lies solely in her skills to be a good wife and mother.

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